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VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER 1-0452
ALICE RICHMAN SCHACHNER/NEW YORK

MARCH 26, 1976

FOCUS: JOSEF ALBERS

ANNCR:

WORLD-FAMOUS ARTIST AND TEACHER JOSEF ALBERS IS DEAD AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY-EIGHT. IN NEW YORK, ALICE RICHMAN LOOKS AT HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK.

VOICE:

DURING THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF HIS LIFE, JOSEF ALBERS CONCENTRATED HIS ATTENTION ON A SINGLE THEME AND A SINGLE SHAPE. HE FILLED SIMPLE, UNADORNED SQUARES WITH THE SUBTLE VARIATIONS OF ONE COLOR. FOR HIM, THIS WAS THE ESSENCE OF THE ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE. "I DON'T BELIEVE THAT 'SELF-EXPRESSION' IS THE AIM OF ART," HE ONCE SAID. "ART IS PERFORMANCE AND IT'S THE CHANGE OF PERFORMANCE, NOT EXPRESSION, THAT EXCITES ME."

JOHN ALBERS WAS BORN IN THE RUHR DISTRICT OF GERMANY ON MARCH NINETEENTH, 1888. HIS FORMAL ART STUDIES BEGAN IN 1913 BUT GRADUALLY HIS RESPECT FOR THE TRADITIONAL AND REPRESENTATIONAL IN ART DECLINED. BY THE MID-NINETEENTWENTIES HE WAS AN INSTRUCTOR AT THE BAUHAUS, THE DESIGN WORKSHOP WHICH WAS FOUNDED BY THE ARCHITECT WALTER GROPIUS. MISTER ALBERS' ASSOCIATES INCLUDED SUCH LUMINARIES AS PAUL KLEE AND WASSILY KANDINSKY.

TOGETHER THEY HELPED PAVE THE WAY FOR THE ACCEPTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ABSTRACT ART. WHEN THE NAZIS CLOSED THE SCHOOL IN 1933 JOSEF ALBERS CAME TO THE UNITED STATES. HERE WITH THE HELP OF PHILIP JOHNSON OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART HE OBTAINED A TEACHING POSITION AT TINY BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE IN THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA. FOR THE NEXT

SIXTEEN YEARS HE GAVE UNORTHODOX AND WIDE-RANGING COURSES IN DESIGN AND MADE THE SCHOOL A CENTER OF AVANT-GRADE THEORIES IN ART. HIS MOST FAMOUS STUDENT AT BLACK MOUNTAIN, ROBERT RAUCHENBERG DESCRIBED HIM AS A "BEAUTIFUL TEACHER, BUT AN IMPOSSIBLE PERSON." BUT, MISTER RAUCHENBERG SAID: "TWENTY-ONE YEARS LATER, I'M STILL LEARNING WHAT HE TAUGHT ME."

IN 1950 MISTER ALBERS WAS APPOINTED AS THE HEAD OF YALE UNIVERSITY'S NEW DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN, A JOB FROM WHICH HE RETIRED IN 1958. IN 1971, HIS WORK WAS HONORED BY A RETROSPECTIVE SHOW AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, ONE OF THE FEW EVER GIVEN TO A LIVING ARTIST. MISTER ALBERS CREDITED HIS VIGOROUS OLD AGE TO THE FACT THAT HE HAD TRIED TO REMAIN A STUDENT. "THAT'S MY SECRET," HE SAID. "STAY A STUDENT, AND YOU DON'T GET OLD." A DEDICATED PAINTER WHO EXPERIMENTED ENDLESSLY, HE RECENTLY REFERRED FONDLY TO HIS WORK AS "NONSENSE." AND HE SAID HE WAS EAGER TO DO THE SAME NONSENSE FOR FIFTY YEARS MORE.

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